

STATEMENT
OF
ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO
ON A
SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

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I am Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, an organization composed of nearly half a million teachers, guidance counselors, college professors, paraprofessionals and other educational personnel. Our members have a great concern for the quality of administration of Federal Education Programs as well as for the implications of that administration for the federal role in educational policy. For this reason we welcome the opportunity to present our views to this Committee on your bill, S. 991, to create a separate cabinet level Department of Education.

Many individuals and groups have lent their names and support to the proposition that a cabinet level Education Department be created. Much of this support has fallen into place because the idea has a surface appeal built on a mythology about what such a department could accomplish. Perhaps it is precisely the simplicity of the idea in the context of the difficulties and complexities of federal education policy-making that make it such an easy pinnacle of cooperative creativity to reach.

I would like to discuss this mythology in some detail before outlining what I think are some very sound reasons why the idea promises more than it can deliver.

I know we all agree that education needs leadership and greater prestige. Proponents of a separate Department of Education have rightfully pointed to these current problems in our public appearance as reasons for a separate Education Department. But shifts in bureaucratic structuring do not mean increases in prestige or leadership. Change in these areas begins with hard work at the state and local level where most education decisions are made. Separate education departments have existed before in our history and have contributed nothing to education's leadership and prestige. Such work in conjunction with a pro-education administration led to the growth of the federal role in the 1960's. An expansion of prestige will come with programmatic success. A separate department certainly will not do it.

There is also a mistaken assumption that everyone concerned is solidly behind the department idea; this is far from true. A Gallup poll released in September 1977 found that a strong plurality of 49% of public school parents oppose taking education out of HEW to create a separate department. The rest either favor the proposition or have no opinion. In no sex, race, or age subgroup examined by the pollsters did a majority support the idea. In fact in only one subgroup did a majority have an opinion at all. Among nonwhites, 51% oppose the creation of a separate Department of Education.

Many seem to believe that the existence of a separate Department of Education will magically result in an increase in federal education funds though they stop short of explaining exactly how this will happen. It is my belief that federal funds for education will increase when the education lobby gets its house in order and proposes clearly defined increases related to explanations of need.

I believe that increases in education funds depend on the public support behind various programs rather than on budget mechanics. If education has clout and the confidence of the American people, it will get the dollars it needs. If it doesn't, it won't. Nor will having a separate department change the currently dominant role of the Office of Management and Budget in administration initiatives. Nor, rightfully, will it change the important role of Congress in approving them.

We are also deeply concerned that a preoccupation with this issue will prevent us from perceiving what is really important. For example, there is a strong relationship between what happens in welfare policy and the financial health of education. Proponents of a separate Department of Education have been regrettably myopic with regard to such relationships. It is precisely because these connections do exist that it makes sense to relate policy initiatives in welfare and health to those in education. One of the problems with education policy-making thus far is that it has been too narrowly conceived. A separate department would only exacerbate this tendency. It is clear that any welfare reform proposal must include a child care and job training component if welfare dependency is to be replaced with a reliance on work. Proposals for a separate Department of Education do not address the fact that more cooperation between the schools and other public services will be needed and not less.

So far I have only discussed misconceptions and misunderstandings about this idea. I also think there are some potential dangers. Our public school system is built upon a system of local control by lay school boards. That this system needs a larger share of federal assistance is beyond dispute. But

the degree to which this should mean a greater amount of federal control is a question that has not been discussed. None of the plans to create a separate Department of Education address this thorny and difficult issue. Namely, what is the federal role on education policy? No other domestic sector of cabinet level status compares with education in terms of the clear limits of federal authority. Is the creation of a cabinet level department in an area which constitutionally is left to the states and localities wise without at least exploring these questions further?

At the same time a separate department may encourage us to narrow our perspectives on what the schools can do. I have already suggested the strong relationship between federal education and welfare policies. There are a number of additional reasons why health, welfare and education administration belong together at the federal level:

1. Our approaches to developing support for child care in all its health and welfare dimensions must take into account the role of the schools. How should early childhood development programs service the needs of welfare mothers? What kind of screening and diagnostic services could the schools offer to very young children?
2. We might look at the schools as a source of jobs for paraprofessionals or paraprofessional trainees coming off welfare. Job components of welfare reform could look to the schools for placement.
3. The schools could serve as the delivery mechanism for federally supported immunization programs.

These examples show that rather than encouraging the traditional go-it-alone tendencies of many educators by setting education's administration off by itself, it makes sense to launch a coordinated health, welfare and education approach to the major problems our nation faces -- poverty, equal educational opportunity, welfare, youth unemployment and health security.

Certainly the imperatives of establishing a national urban policy weigh heavily on the side of comprehensive, integrated approaches over isolated ones.

Possibilities like these also match political realities. The merits of the existing structure have been recognized by Congress both in its committee structure which acknowledges the importance of relating programs and exercising broad authority (Senate Human Resources Committee, Senate Labor-HEW Appropriations Committee, House Labor and Education Committee). In fact, an effort to split the House Education and Labor Committee failed precisely because programs are so inter-related. Since Congressional decisions will still be made in consolidated form by Congressmen who are thereby encouraged to look at policies across sectors, it makes little sense to detach the administration of education programs from the Congressional pattern.

I would like to point out that higher education interests have been less than enthusiastic about the separate department idea, and for some very good reasons. As the organization with more college professor members than any other in this country, we are deeply concerned with their point of view. Twenty-five percent of higher education funds come from the federal level while only 9% of elementary and secondary education funds are federal. Research funds for institutions of higher education come from practically every department in the federal government. Their administration probably never could, or should, be consolidated. Yet, the creation of a separate Department of Education would probably be characterized primarily by moving the Education Division, dominated by elementary and secondary interests, out of HEW. Would higher education benefit or be overshadowed by a new department in which their voices are even harder to project?

We are also concerned that others will pick up the education community's misconception that cabinet level status is what leads to power. Adding a new department to the Cabinet will increase the pressure coming from other groups to follow suit by demanding their own separate departments. It will simply set off a trend that equates the importance of policy initiatives in areas like consumer affairs, culture and health with the existence of a Cabinet Department. As misguided as this trend might be, once education had successfully moved on such an equation, it is almost inevitable that others would take up the argument. In fact such a bill has already been introduced for health, justified I might add, with the exact logic and arguments used for separating education. The more departments there are, the more difficult it will be to coordinate approaches that effect more than one area.

One side effect of building higher level bureaucracies could well be the sinking of valuable program funds into administration. While this might be worthy, should there be new substantial programs to administer, it hardly seems worth it for the sake of status alone.

There is one specific aspect of your reorganization proposal I would like to address. Many have suggested that the manpower training functions now run by the Department of Labor should be assumed by a separate Department of Education. We are very much in favor of education playing a greater role in the administration of programs that effect secondary school students. We have urged the education community to press for more responsibility in administering Comprehensive Employment and Training Act funds and played a key role in getting CETA funds delivered to local education agencies in the new Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act. But, we believe that manpower training is appropriately the responsibility of the Labor Department and would

object to any attempt to transfer these functions to a separate Department of Education. The Labor Department understands the relationship of training to the problems and needs of the workforce from long experience. We would hate to see such programs administered in isolation from the labor context in which they belong.

These are my doubts about and objections to the separate Department of Education idea. Nevertheless, I do think there are steps that could be taken to improve the federal administration of education programs. I would like to offer some alternatives to your proposal:

1. It is obvious to nearly everyone that it makes no sense to have two authorities overseeing the Education Division in HEW. While the Assistant Secretary theoretically has more status and policy control, program authority rests with the Commissioner. These authorities should be consolidated into one. It might also be desirable to raise the status of the education authority, as well as those for health and welfare, to Undersecretary -- modeled after the Defense Department Undersecretaries. This clarification of roles and responsibilities could help to end the confusion and competition that now characterizes the Education Division.
2. Research authorities within the Education Division could be consolidated under the National Institute of Education. It makes more sense to separate research from program administration if objectivity is of any importance. The National Center for Education Statistics should also be under the NIE umbrella.
3. Some programs now administered by other divisions of HEW should be administered by the Education Division. The most obvious of these are Head Start and Early Periodic Screening and Diagnosis, both of which sponsor many school-based programs.
4. The Federal Interagency Committee on Education could be strengthened even further and its status upgraded. The Secretary of HEW should sit on this committee and it should have the statutory authority to coordinate HEW and Labor Department Administration of CETA, for example.

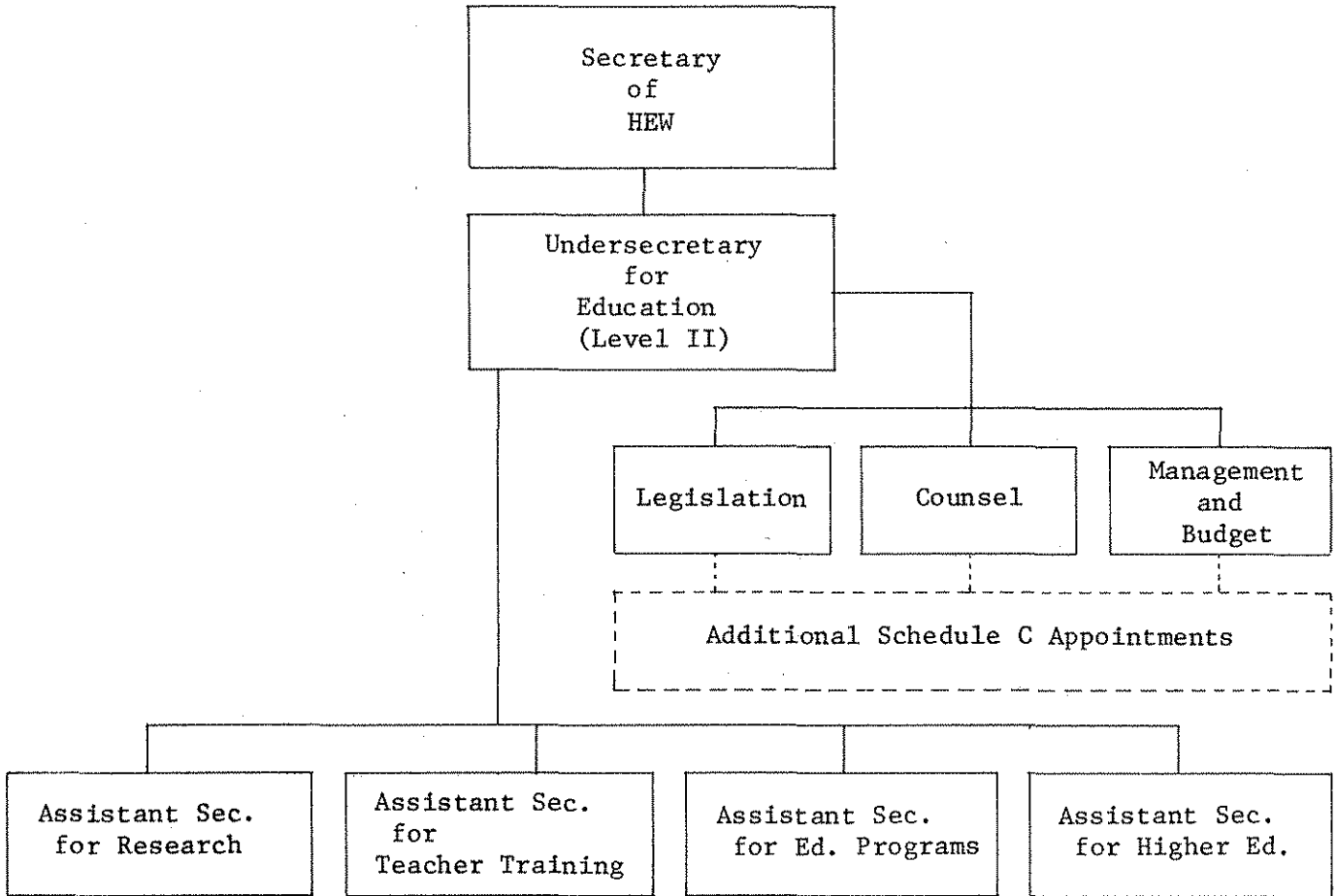
My reservations about the separate Department of Education idea are based on the premise that organization, or reorganization, provide the means to an end. I have not seen in any of the arguments projected for a separate Department of Education any clear presentation of what ends its proponents have in mind. Status and prestige are certainly very vague program goals for educators to be fussing about. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the great enthusiasm for a separate Department of Education makes some very real doubts about where we should be going. One of the inherent difficulties of reaching agreement about the federal role in education is the great difference in the perspective of federal, state and local interests in educational policy. The degree and substance of these differences is far greater for education than for other sectors in which the federal government plays a significant role.

Some sort of agreement is something we must work toward. The AFT hopes that efforts will be concentrated on significant federal initiatives in behalf of education and for solving the basic skills crisis our schools now face. We think that a separate Department of Education is a non-answer to these very real and pressing problems.

I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee has.

Thank You

Appendix
Proposed Upgrading Plan
for Education Division
Within HEW



Note: This chart has been developed only as far as the level of Assistant Secretary. Existing programs will fall in their logical position within each office.